

# Still Serving in JROTC

Story and Photos by  
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**T**HEY retained their uniforms, rank and pay, but for many Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps instructors at Leavenworth High School in Leavenworth, Kan., making the transition from soldier to teacher took some time.

CSM Alexander Evans said his thoughts in his first few days as an instructor were something like, “I’m the sergeant major here and these students are under my supervision and will do what I want.” Well, it didn’t work that way.”

Evans said he realized very quickly that his rank meant nothing by itself in

the JROTC environment.

“I learned,” he said, “to take all the things it took for me to become sergeant major — the personality, the leadership techniques and all the things gathered from life’s experiences — and focus them on influencing the kids to do what I want, rather than telling them.”

Instructor 1SG James Robben agrees that the transition can be a bit rocky.

“You have to earn the respect of these kids,” he said. “Because no matter what your rank is, they just don’t care. What they do care about is whether you’re a good teacher and care about their education.

“Once they have that answer —

once the students know you really do care about them as people — you’ll do just fine. But if you think you can use your rank as a lever, you won’t last long in JROTC,” he said.

## Becoming an Instructor

Soldiers joining the JROTC program must have retired honorably from active military service, have reached the rank of sergeant first class or higher, and must pass an extensive and intense interview process with the school where they’ll be working.

“A lot of people misunderstand our role,” said Evans. “We are teachers who’ve had to meet the same requirements as any other teacher in this

school. Our certification is based on our military record and an interview that also takes into account our experience working with youth.”

## The Mission

“We motivate those young people to become better citizens,” Evans said. “We do that through a regimented program of instruction put out by Cadet Command at Fort Monroe, Va., covering such ‘basic areas of development’ as leadership, communication, physical fitness and community service.”

And like the military, instructors award ribbons

**CSM Alexander Evans conducts an early morning class for JROTC cadets at Leavenworth High School.**



*“Overall, you can’t top this as a second career. But you’ve got to love the kids. If you don’t, you can’t lead them.”*



**Leavenworth sophomore Kristina Reed helps position junior Kristi Macey's cap before an early-morning JROTC inspection.**

and certificates to students who best exemplify these traits and to those who achieve perfect class attendance, good appearance and good conduct, and who participate in special teams such as the color guard, “rangers” and drum-and-bugle corps.

“I love what we do, because we get to do fun things like camping,” said cadet Jessica Jones, a sophomore who plans to follow in her father’s footsteps by joining the Army.

Approximately 40 percent of Leavenworth’s JROTC cadets are family members of active or retired military.

“The stuff we do is great,” said cadet Stephen Jeselink. “There’s a small group of us rangers and none of us look at this as something that’s just fun. All the things we do in JROTC give us more to build on for our futures, whether in the Army or not.”

Ranger commander and senior Steven Glanzer agrees, although he definitely plans to enlist.

“I joined JROTC and the rangers because I wanted to commit to something,” he said. “The program teaches drill and ceremony, living a healthy lifestyle, how to socialize with

people, good study habits — nobody slouches in this program. If I do, the sergeant major is there to chew me out.”

Robben emphasizes that though the JROTC program is sponsored by the military, the focus is not to get the students to enlist.

“Unlike the senior ROTC program, where a cadet must eventually sign a contract with the Army, our students can attend JROTC for four years and graduate with no military obligation,” he said.

But if the student does express a military interest, instructors are ready to help. “We’re often asked by recruiters to provide a written recommendation for students who want to enlist,” said Robben.

Due to the student’s JROTC experience, he or she can enter military service with a rank as high as private first class, and Robben said many ROTC graduates earn appointments to the military academies.

“This is my 10th year here,” he said. “And every year we’ve had at



**Cadets line up for a uniform inspection; the inspections are held on the one day a week when cadets are required to wear their uniforms.**



**Student ranger commander Steven Glanzer inspects the equipment of fellow ranger John Reynolds before the team sets off on a 20-mile hike.**

least four kids go to the academies” he said.

## The Greatest Reward

“Watching the children develop makes it all worthwhile,” said Evans. “The greatest reward you get is when they come back five or six years later and say, ‘You were so right, sergeant major. I’m glad I went through this program.’”

Evans said he wishes more schools had programs like JROTC — which reinforce core values needed for development.

Both Evans and Robben recommend JROTC as a new career after active duty.

“Overall,” said Evans, “you can’t top this as a second career. But you’ve got to love the kids. If you don’t, you can’t lead them.”

“This is not for people who can’t work with kids,” Robben agreed. “But who are you primarily working with in the military but young people?” □